

Message Text

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12

ACTION EA-14

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9317

INFO USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 786

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CH

SUBJ: THE NEW ROUND OF STRUGGLES IN CHINESE POLITICS

SUMMARY. GAINS IN POLITICAL RECONSTRUCTION, AND THE LIFTING OF THE MILITARY'S SUPPRESSING ROLE IN CIVIL AFFAIRS, APPEAR TO BE USHERING IN A NEW PHASE OF MORE OPEN POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN CHINA. THERE IS MORE ACTIVITY ON THE POLITICAL SCENE NOW, INCLUDING

EFFORTS AT MASS AGITATION, THAN THERE HAS BEEN FOR SOME TIME. THE LEFT IS ON THE ATTACK AGAINST THE TREND TOWARD BACKSLIDING FROM THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, A TREND WHICH IS HARD TO DISTINGUISH FROM MODERATION AND PRAGMATISM. THE OUTCOME IS NOT FORESEEABLE, BUT THE STRUGGLE COULD PREEMPT CHINESE ATTENTION. END SUMMARY.

1. THE NEW POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE DEVELOPING IN CHINA OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY EVIDENT IN RECENT WEEKS. THERE IS MORE AGITATION IN THE CURRENT SCENE THAN THERE HAS BEEN SINCE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, ALBEIT STILL MILD BY COMPARISON. FROM ALL INDICATIONS THIS ACTIVITY WILL CONTINUE TO
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UNFOLD FOR SOME TIME TO COME AND ITS OBJECTIVES ARE LIKELY TO

BE REDEFINED IN THE PROCESS. THE THOUGHTS WE CAN OFFER AT THIS POINT ARE NECESSARILY TENUOUS AND SPECULATIVE.

2. VIEWED FROM HONG KONG, THERE IS NO SINGLE CONCEPT OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN CHINA THAT IS EXCLUSIVELY PERSUASIVE. WE WOULD DISCARD AS MISPERFECT THE VIEW THAT THE CURRENT ANTI-RIGHTIST CAMPAIGN, BECAUSE IT IS OFFICIALLY SANCTIONED AND APPARENTLY UNDER TIGHT CONTROL, IS SIMPLY ANOTHER IDEOLOGICAL EDUCATION MOVEMENT. REVISIONIST BACKSLIDING HAD BECOME QUITE APPARENT; WE WERE POINTING TO IT LAST YEAR AS REFLECTING PROGMATISM AND MODERATION. THE TREND WAS SERIOUS ENOUGH TO WARRANT A STRONG REACTION FROM THE LEFT.

3. MOVEMENTS BEFORE HAVE STARTED OUT LIKE THIS AS EDUCATIONAL AND THEN LED TO PURGES AND CHANGES OF POLICY. WE CANNOT RULE THAT OUT AS A POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCE OF THE PRESENT MOVEMENT; HOWEVER, WE DO NOT SEE THAT AS INEVITABLE AND WE WOULD SET ASIDE, AS EXTREME AND UNSUPPORTABLE AT THIS TIME, THE VIEW THAT CHINA IS ON THE EVE OF ANOTHER VIOLENT SPASM LIKE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION.

4. A VIEW WE ARE DRAWN TO IS THAT THE CURRENT VIGOR IS AN OUTGROWTH OR COMPONENT OF THE PROGRESS MADE IN RECONSTRUCTING THE REGIME AND BALANCING A NEW COALITION OF POLITICAL FACTIONS. COUPLE THIS GAIN IN POLITICAL FRAMEWORK WITH THE REMOVAL OF THE MILITARY FROM THEIR ERSTWHILE COMMANDING POSITION OVER CIVIL AFFAIRS--WHICH WAS SMOTHERING POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND DRIVING IT INTO COVERT CHANNELS--AND THE STAGE HAS BEEN SET, THE CURTAIN RAISED FOR A ROUND OF MORE OPEN POLITICAL CONTENTION. VOICES WITHIN THE REGIME HAVE BEEN URGING THIS FOR SOMETIME (1973 HONG KONG 1235).

5. THE ANTI-RIGHTIST NATURE OF THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN MAY BE INTENDED TO CORRECT THE RECENT REVISIONIST DRIFT AND ULTIMATELY TO SET A MODERATE-LEFT DIRECTION FOR THE NEW COALITION. WHATEVER THE PLAN, THE CAMPAIGN HAS HAD A TEMPERING EFFECT ON TENG'S ELEVATION TO THE POLITBURO, WHICH OTHERWISE WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED AS A CLEAR SIGNAL OF FURTHER RETREAT FROM THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION.

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6. ONE PROBLEM WE HAVE WITH THIS PERSPECTIVE IS THAT IT IMPLIES A NEW NORMALCY IN CHINESE POLITICS WHICH AT THIS POINT

CANNOT BE PROVED LET ALONE DELIMITED. THE REGIME HAS DEMONSTRATED TWO IMPORTANT CAPABILITIES: POLITICAL LOSERS LIKE TENG CAN BE REACCOMMODATED AND AS THE SHIFT OF REGIONAL COMMANDERS CONVINCINGLY SHOWED, THE ARMY CAN BE TAKEN OUT OF CIVIL AFFAIRS.

BUT BETWEEN THE MAKING OF THESE CORRECTIVE ADJUSTMENTS AND THE CAPACITY FOR MANIC EXCESSES AND TRAUMATIC INTRIGUES WHICH WAS DEMONSTRATED IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND MORE RECENTLY IN THE LIN PIAO AFFAIR, THERE IS POTENTIAL SCOPE FOR CONTENTION MORE THAN SUFFICIENT TO UNSEAT LEADERS AND ALTER POLICIES. THE CHINESE

HAVE NOT SHOWN HOW THEY WILL PROCEED, AND WE HAVE DECEIVED OURSELVES IN THE PAST BY PROJECTING ON THEM NORMS WHICH THEY HAD NOT TESTED THEMSELVES. WHATEVER THE NEW RULES, WE CAN ASSUME THAT THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER WILL CONTINUE.

7. IT IS THIS POTENTIAL FOR DECISIVE POLITICAL STRUGGLES, AS WELL AS THE OBLIGATION TO REPORT WHAT WE SEE, WHICH HAS CAUSED US TO FOCUS ON THE REASSERTION OF LEFTIST ACTIVISM AND EFFORTS AT MASS AGITATION. WE THINK IT INSTRUCTIVE THAT A PRESUMABLY GREATER ALLOWANCE FOR OPEN POLITICAL CONTENTION SHOULD FIND THE LEFT ON THE OFFENSIVE, WHILE THE FORCES OF REVISIONISM (STILL TO BE DISTINGUISHED FROM MODERATION AND PROGMATISM IN OUR EYES) WHICH HAD BEEN IN THE ASCENDANCY AS LATE AS SIX MONTHS AGO SHOULD BE UNDER ATTACK.

8. AS THE CURRENT ANTI-RIGHTIST CAMPAIGN APPEARS TO BE OFFICIAL, THE LEFT PRESUMABLY HAS THE NOD FROM MAO. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW FAR THEY CAN GO WITH IT. WE WOULD ASSUME THAT MAO'S GREAT SHOW OF INVOLVEMENT IN SINO-US RELATIONS AS RECENTLY AS THE SECRETARY'S VISIT IN NOVEMBER, BY WHICH TIME THE LEFT WAS ALREADY CLEARLY ON THE ATTACK, RELATIVELY INSULATES OUR BASIC CONCERNS AGAINST ANY FRONTAL ASSAULT AT THIS TIME.

9. BUT SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS NOTWITHSTANDING, THE SIGNS VIEWED FROM HERE RAISE A POSSIBILITY THAT THE CHINESE MAY GENERALLY BE LESS POLITICALLY RELAXED, AND MORE IDEOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE THAN THEY WERE THROUGHOUT MUCH OF LAST YEAR.
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THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION REMAINS A VIVID, FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE FOR MOST CHINESE AND IT SHOULD NOT COME AS A SURPRISE IF REMINDERS OF IT PREEMPT THEIR ATTENTION.
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